



Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (MPAC)

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Advocacy group files federal complaint on prisoner death

AUGUSTA -- A formal request was submitted Friday to Jonathan Smith, chief of the Special Litigation Section, Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, requesting an investigation into the death of Maine prisoner Victor Valdez and reoccurring medical neglect and security violations at Maine State Prison, as well as in Maine's other prisons

Valdez died in state custody at Maine State Prison in Warren in November 2009. Valdez was cremated without a medical examination, and state corrections officials informed the Valdez family in New York that he died of natural causes.

The Maine Attorney General's Office recently rendered an opinion on the Valdez case that concluded there is no compelling evidence to indicate Valdez died of anything other than natural causes.

The request sent Friday to the federal DOJ was submitted by the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (M-PAC), a statewide group that focuses on addressing problems and concerns in Maine's correctional system.

M-PAC officials believe Valdez's death may have occurred because of medical neglect and abuse by staff and are working with family members to have all of Valdez's medical records released by the state.

The request to DOJ keeps a promise M-PAC made publicly during a demonstration in Augusta last fall to seek a federal review of Valdez's death.

The DOJ request has been broadened to include the case of Sheldon Weinstein, who died in segregation in April 2009 of a ruptured spleen, also while being held at MSP.

In the Weinstein case, the AG's Office has failed to date to seek a grand jury indictment, although the Maine State Police investigation was completed in early June 2009 concluding his death was a homicide. Weinstein's remains were also cremated after prison authorities informed his family that he, as was the case with Valdez, had died of natural causes.

The M-PAC petition to federal investigations points to a "...systemic, wanton and callous disregard for the pain and suffering of prisoners, particularly diabetics, the mentally ill, and elderly inmates with a variety of disabilities."

For more information, call M-PAC co-directors Judy Garvey or Jim Bergin at 207-374-3608 or 374-2437.

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